

Supporting a student post-liver transplant

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Contacts: RCH Education Institute and RCH Liver Transplant Team

What is a liver transplant?

A liver transplant is an operation to replace a person's liver (recipient) with another person's liver (donor). It is usually undertaken when liver disease becomes so severe that the liver fails to function and no longer supports life.

Support mechanisms

Schools are encouraged to explore support mechanisms available to students who have undergone a liver transplant. There are a range of resources available to assist schools. Please contact RCH Education Institute or the RCH campus of the Victorian Liver Transplant Unit (VLTU) for further information.

Transition to school

Following a liver transplant, it may be three to six months before the student is able to return to school full-time, and a gradual transition back to school is usually recommended. Some students may find the transition difficult and additional support may be required.

Strategies for schools supporting students post-liver transplant

The implementation of the whole-school and classroom strategies listed below will assist and support students following a liver transplant. While the supports and initiatives aim to build the capacity of schools in recognising the general needs of these students, we also acknowledge that individual needs may vary.

Whole-school approach

- The school, health professionals, family and student should work in collaboration to best support the student at school.
- Discuss other related health concerns such as dietary requirements and potential risks to the student's immunosuppressant system.
- Educate staff and students on liver transplantation.



- Establish a key contact person with whom the family and student can liaise with regard to liver transplant and school issues.
- Assign a key contact person who can monitor, explore and assist with stress-related issues.
- Include a notice in the school newsletter requiring all parents/guardians to notify the school of chickenpox or tuberculosis. The common cold or similar infections do not usually present a serious risk.
- Discuss the medication needs with the student's parent/guardian and use as directed. This includes paracetamol, homeopathic and naturopathic medicines.
- Do NOT give live vaccines to a student who is receiving immunosuppressant medications.
- Involve the student in extracurricular activities, but recognise that participation may be limited in the initial post-transplant period. This should be discussed with the parents/guardians.
- Contact parents/guardians immediately if the student:
 - Appears unwell
 - Has a temperature above 38° Celsius
 - Has vomited more than three or four times during the day
 - Has had more than three or four loose stools during the day
 - Has severe abdominal pain.

Classroom approach

- Do allow short rest breaks to assist with issues of concentration and fatigue.
- DIET: No *grapefruit* and *grapefruit juice* should be given as they interfere with immunosuppressant medications. There are no other dietary requirements.
- PETS: No *reptile handling* as they may transmit serious infections. Pets may be handled after a transplant, but thorough hand-washing is essential.
- SPORT: No *swimming in heated pools* for the first 12 months due to the high presence of infectious organisms. However, when all tubes have been removed, the student may swim at the beach or in an outdoor *unheated* pool. Parents will advise when swimming may be resumed. *All contact (and vigorous) sport must be avoided* until advised otherwise by the doctor (or parent/guardian). It may be 12 months or more before it is safe to resume these activities.
- Ensure the student is wearing protective clothing and SPF 30+ sunscreen when outdoors.
- Educate the class about liver transplantation in consultation with the student and parents/guardians. This may assist with possible adverse reactions from peers.
- Ensure that the student receives relevant educational support for missed work.
- Include the student in special events and activities such as class parties or school productions.



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Contacts: RCH Education Institute and RCH Liver Transplant Team

The RCH Education Institute and RCH Liver Transplant Team encourage schools to contact us should they require further information.

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